

## BILL OF RIGHTS For Residential Customers of Water Utilities



The South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff wants water utility customers to know their rights and responsibilities and whom to contact for assistance when they have questions or problems regarding regulated water service.

### BE AN INFORMED CUSTOMER. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS.

1. As a general rule, ***you have the right***, to establish water service if you meet these requirements: provide the water utility with necessary and reasonable access to the premises to be served, your utilization of the water service does not pose a hazardous or dangerous condition, and there is already water service in your area. If there are no water lines near your home, you may or may not have the right to have the lines extended to serve you. If the lines are extended to serve you, you may be required to pay part of the cost of the extension. If you have any questions concerning your right to the service, you should contact the water utility serving your subdivision.
2. ***You have the right*** to establish water service if you satisfactorily establish your credit and neither you nor any member of your household is indebted to the water utility. You may be required to pay a deposit if any one of the following conditions exist:
  - You have had two (2) consecutive 30-day arrears in the past twenty-four (24) months or more than two (2) non-consecutive 30-day arrears in the past twenty-four (24) months; or
  - You cannot furnish either an acceptable co-signer or guarantor, who is a customer of the same water utility with good credit, to guarantee payment up to the amount of the maximum deposit; or
  - You have had your water service terminated for non-payment.***You have the right*** to have all conditions of obtaining service explained to you by the utility's personnel.
3. If you are required to make a deposit, the maximum amount cannot exceed an amount equal to an estimated two (2) months (60 days) billing for a new customer, or an amount equal to the total actual bills of the two (2) highest consecutive months based on your billing history of the preceding twelve (12) months, or portion of the year if the service is on a seasonal basis.
4. If you make a deposit with the utility, ***you have the right*** to have your deposit refunded to you after two (2) years unless you have had two (2) consecutive 30-day arrears in the past twenty-four (24) months or more than two (2) non-consecutive 30-day arrears in the past twenty-four (24) months, or your service has been terminated for nonpayment or fraudulent use, or you discontinue service with the utility and leave an unpaid balance. (Deposits held longer than six (6) months accrue interest at a rate prescribed by the Public Service Commission.)
5. ***You have the right*** to avoid late payment fees if you pay your bill within twenty-five (25) days of the billing date shown on your water bill for current monthly charges. A maximum of one and one-half percent (1½%) may be added to any unpaid balance not paid within twenty-five (25) days of the billing date to cover the cost of collection and carrying accounts in arrears.
6. ***You have the right*** to be given written notice from the utility at least ten (10) days before your water service is scheduled to be disconnected for non-payment.
7. ***You have the right***, prior to a scheduled disconnection of your service, to arrange with the water utility for a Deferred Payment Plan (DPP) to make payment by installments if you can show that you are unable to pay the amount due. In this DPP arrangement, you must make installment payments of not less than 1/6 of the outstanding balance for a period not to exceed six (6) months, and you must pay, in full, your current monthly charges. You are not eligible for another DPP if you already

have a DPP with the utility. The utility may terminate service if you fail to meet the terms and conditions of such DPP.

8. If the water utility has overcharged you as a result of a misapplied schedule, an error in reading the meter, a skipped meter reading, or any other human or machine error, **you have the right** to a credit or refund of the excess amount paid, not to exceed the applicable Statute of Limitations.
9. If the water utility has undercharged you for any reason other than fraud or theft, **you have the right** to pay in equal installments the deficient amount resulting from the water utility undercharging you as a result of a misapplied schedule, an error in reading the meter, a skipped meter reading, or any other human or machine error. The equal installment amount shall be added to the bill over the same number of billing periods during which you were undercharged.
10. **You have the right** to have the water utility test your meter for accuracy if you suspect a malfunction. This test will be conducted without charge if requested more than twelve (12) months from the date of the meter installation or from the last date the meter was tested for accuracy. **You have the right** to be present or to appoint a representative to be present when the water utility tests the meter. **You have the right** to be furnished with the results of the meter test. If an overcharge or undercharge occurred as a result of a fast or slow meter with an error in registration of more than three percent (3%), the bills will be increased or decreased accordingly for a period up to sixty (60) days.
11. **You have the right** to have the water utility inform you of the method of reading your meter, and provide you with an explanation of the utility's billing procedures.
12. **You have the right** to contact the water utility or its authorized representatives at all hours in case of emergency or unscheduled interruptions in your water service.
13. **You have the right** to have a complaint investigated by the utility promptly and thoroughly.
14. If you need assistance with a complaint against your water utility that you cannot resolve by dealing with the water utility on your own, **you have the right** to contact the Office of Regulatory Staff's Consumer Services Department. Consumer Services will work with you and the water utility in an effort to resolve your complaint. The Office of Regulatory Staff is located in Columbia and can be reached by calling its toll free telephone number, 1-800-922-1531 or, if from the Columbia area, (803) 737-5252 or at [www.regulatorystaff.sc.gov](http://www.regulatorystaff.sc.gov).
15. If, after working with the water utility and the Office of Regulatory Staff's Consumer Services Department, you are not satisfied with the outcome, **you have the right** to file your complaint with the Public Service Commission (PSC). To file a complaint with the Public Service Commission you must complete their Consumer Complaint form. This form is available online at [www.psc.sc.gov/consumer/info.asp](http://www.psc.sc.gov/consumer/info.asp) or you can request that a form be mailed to you by calling the Public Service Commission's Docketing Department at 803-896-5100. The completed complaint form should be mailed to the Public Service Commission, Post Office Drawer 11649, Columbia, South Carolina 29211 or faxed to 803-896-5199.

*The South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff wants to inform you of your rights and responsibilities as a consumer, wants you to understand the responsibilities of your water utility, and wants you to call upon its Consumer Services Department if you need assistance. This statement gives you a summary of your rights as a customer of a water utility. More detailed provisions are set out in law, PSC rules and regulations, and the tariffs of the water utility.*